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CHAPTER IV

DEATHS 喪禮

713 WHEN a person seems just about to die a few bundles of cash-paper are burned at his side; two candles and some incense are also burned. The dying person is sometimes moved from the bed and laid on the ground, but it is more lucky to die in bed. The superstitious, however, will not afterwards use the bed where one has died, for fear of the demons. Children of the dying kneel at the bedside while the spirit takes its departure. Rice is thrown about the house to drive away demons, if by any means the life may still be saved.

As soon as life is gone a tablet is set up. On its front is written the name of the dead, and on the back the dates of birth and death, with the characters for the five elements, gold, wood, fire, water and earth.

Beside the tablet, to call the spirit to enter it, a yellow paper flag is set up bearing the characters meaning, "To the goddess of mercy who saves from suffering."

If the corpse does not stiffen or does not close its eyes there is fear that more deaths in the family will soon follow.

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Soon after death the evil influences of the dead are let out from the house *ch'u ssŭ hsing* or *sha* 出死星 or 煞, by poking a stick or bamboo pole through the roof; a person inside calls, "Has it come out?" and one outside replies, "It has come out." Then the stick is pushed through the hole onto the roof, and no one will touch it again if he knows it has been used for this purpose.

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Before death the bed-curtains are removed, that the spirit may have easy exit. After death the body is laid on the ground or on the coffin-lid to cool.

In the case of the aged, one envelope full of paper money for each year the deceased has lived is burned in the central room. While this is done the corpse is bound in a chair, and an umbrella held over its head; women wave peach and willow branches toward heaven, and others flourish knives toward the earth, lest hungry ghosts should come and rob the dead of his travelling money.

The ashes of this paper imitation money are gathered and put into a jar, to be buried with the body, either in the coffin or beside it. The idea is that as soon as the spirit is free it is in need of cash to secure its passage through the various courts of Hades.

Five garments of each kind, suitable for all seasons of the year, are often put on the corpse. The shoes are made with cloth or grass soles, no leather being allowed. The coverlet is often very expensive. The pillow is filled with sawdust, cedar branches, or wood ashes.

In wealthy families the whole body is bound in a single piece of white cloth or silk, each finger, toe and limb being bound up by itself. Only the napkin for the head is separate. After this, or, in poor families, after the corpse has been washed and shaved, it is dressed. No outsiders are allowed to see these operations.

In ancient times it was believed that a precious stone held in the mouth 含玉 *han yü*, would preserve the corpse from corruption. The custom now is to put a piece of silver or some small article in the mouth.

It is said that a corpse has a small loaf of bread placed in one hand and a stick in the other. If attacked by a dog